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SUBJECT: BERDIMUHAMMEDOV CONTINUES TO PUSH FOR MORE EDUCATION,
CULTURE REFORMS

SUMMARY

1. (U) President Berdimuhammedov finally filled the position he himself had occupied as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and announced further dramatic and likely progressive changes to the education and cultural sector in a March 16 Cabinet of Ministers meeting. In a surprising move, Berdimuhammedov promoted former - and recently reappointed Minister of Education Hydyr Saparliyev as Deputy Chairman in charge of a broad portfolio including education (including the National Archives), science, healthcare, culture, sport, religious affairs and public organizations -- and indirect oversight of all state media and publishing. He appointed the reputedly progressive rector of Turkmenistan's Institute of National Economy, Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov, to replace Saparliyev as Minister of Education. Berdimuhammedov expanded on earlier stated plans for curriculum reform in Turkmenistan's schools and urged greater activism in the (state-controlled) social sector. Chastising Minister of Culture Enebay Atayeva, he reassigned oversight of all state media to the President's Press Secretary, and announced his intention to create a new deputy chairman position for culture within the Council of Ministers. End Summary.

Curriculum Reform to be Broadened

2. (U) Despite his evident fear and discomfort in his one meeting with post while Minister of Education under the Niyazov administration, Saparliyev has now been catapulted to a position of great authority under Berdimuhammedov. One FSN who worked tangentially with Saparliyev contends he is competent to take this role, as the current operating environment is a dramatic departure from that under Niyazov. Rector of the Turkmen Institute of National Economy Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov took Saparliyev's place as Minister of Education, and Gulshat Sahyevna Mammedova assumed the position of deputy minister of education for kindergartens and secondary schools. Mammedova had been director of the Gurbansoltan Eje School and chairperson of the Ashgabat City Education Administration. (Note: There is no news on the fate of former deputy minister Jemal Bashimov. End Note.)

3. (U) In addition to these leadership changes, Berdimuhammedov again emphasized the enormity of the proposed education sector changes he proposed. For the first time, he publicly mentioned the need to reform curricula and textbooks from the kindergarten level all the way up through higher education institutions. (Comment: Such a statement opens the possibility, for the first time, that

there could be a change in the way Ruhnama study, among other subjects, is handled in schools. End Comment.)

14. (U) Berdimuhammedov again welcomed expanding study abroad opportunities and invited cooperation with foreign specialists in such fields as "economics, engineering, and computer technology." Military faculties -- operated in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense -- were to open at Turkmen State University, the Agricultural University, the Polytechnic Institute and the Transport and Communications Institute. (Comment: With the creation of such institutes, military service will likely no longer be obligatory for university-level students, although it will persist as a requirement for those not entering higher education institutions. End Comment.)

Call to Energize the Social, Cultural Sectors

15. (U) Berdimuhammedov also called for Saparlyev to energize the social sector through closer work with religious groups and social organizations such as the Women's and Youth Unions and the Galkynysh (Revival) Movement, saying that these groups have been too passive. He urged the head of Youth Unions to work more closely with secondary schools and higher education institutions and make an effort to be a visible presence in state mass media.

16. (U) He also urged greater activity in the sports and tourism sectors. Most importantly, he hoped that Turkmenistan's youth would achieve a higher status in international sports competitions. He stated that Ashgabat youth underachieved relative to their peers in the regions; stadiums should be built in each region and the Ministry of Sports and Tourism should provide greater support for young sportsmen, either by admitting them to the Sports Institute in Ashgabat or supporting them in efforts to compete internationally.

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Saparlyev should also enliven the tourism sector by ensuring better advertising for Turkmenistan's natural and historical sites.

Shake-Up in Media, Cultural Spheres

17. (U) Culture Minister Atayeva's star has fallen precipitously, with Berdimuhammedov reprimanding her during the meeting for sloppiness in her oversight of state television, a lack of initiative in programming -- including allowing state television and radio to recycle old material -- lying, and not being at her place of work. While some had regarded Atayeva as a possible candidate for the Deputy Minister position, President Berdimuhammedov made clear that her days were numbered. This criticism was prompted by a March 13 state news television broadcast of a segment (presumably about technology) that was at least three years out of date; Berdimuhammedov urged state media to update its knowledge and use of modern technologies.

18. (U) Berdimuhammedov announced his intention to create a new deputy minister position for culture, and assigned full interim responsibility for print and broadcast media, including the State Publishing Service, the Committee on Protecting State Secrets in the Press, and the State News Service, to Presidential Press Secretary Akmurat Hudayberdiyev (reappointed to that position on February 27).

According to one of his former employees, Hudayberdiyev had long shunned the limelight, with the result that few were aware of his position in the administration until his reappointment. Hudayberdiyev provided a recommendation to a former subordinate to support her participation in the Humphrey Fellowship -- when such support was risky among government employees.

Comment

19. (U) Post is cautiously optimistic about the reshuffling of these officials. Just as it was difficult to foresee Berdimuhammedov's potential as a reformer under Niyazov, these new appointees did not particularly distinguish themselves as forward-leaning under the former president. Yet, the President's statements and the new

appointments appear to signal Berdimuhammedov's commitment to carry through with significant, progressive reform, at least in the education sector. End Comment.

Biographical Note

¶10. (U) Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov was appointed Minister of Education on March 16, 2007. He was born in 1959 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Received BA in Economics from Turkmenistan's Institute of National Economy, Ashgabat, and an MA (Kandidatskaya) in Economic Sciences from the Moscow Finance Institute.
1980 - 1986 Secretary of Youth Organization, instructor;
1986 - 1989 Post-graduate student of Moscow Finance Institute;
1989 - 1993 Turkmen Institute of National Economy, Senior Instructor, Associate Professor of the Accounting Department;
1993 - 1997 Turkmen Institute of National Economy, Deputy Dean of Calculation in the Statistics Department;
1997 - 1998 Turkmen Institute of National Economy, Associate Professor of the Accounting, Auditing and Statistics Department;
1998 - 2002 Turkmen Institute of National Economy, Dean of the Economics Department;
2002 - 2004 Turkmen Institute of National Economy, Vice-Rector for academics at the Institute;
2004 - 2007 Rector of the Turkmen Institute of National Economy.
End Note.

¶11. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered

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